

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN

**VANDERBILT FORUM ON PEDIATRIC OBESITY: DEVELOPING UNIQUE
PARTNERSHIPS TO HALT THE EPIDEMIC**

October 15, 2008

Thank you to Vanderbilt University for hosting this forum on childhood obesity. And thank you to all of our outstanding speakers who are furthering our understanding and ability to combat this growing epidemic. Many of you are national leaders on this issue, and we appreciate your participation.

Most of all, I want to thank and congratulate my friend and colleague, Commissioner Deborah Tate, for bringing us together to address this problem. She has been a strong advocate for American families and children. As a parent with young children myself, I certainly appreciate her tenacity in working to promote their well-being. She has repeatedly put the spotlight on the health, wellness and safety of children. Today's event is a culmination of her hard work and passion for this cause. Thanks, Commissioner Tate, for organizing and hosting us, and for all you do on behalf of our children.

As we have heard today from experts, food marketing on TV targeted to children is among the many factors contributing to childhood obesity. The facts show that a vast majority of the food marketed to children are high in calories, high in sugar or salt, and low in nutritional value. Studies show that TV advertising influences children's food and beverage preferences. Why else would marketers pay athletes like Olympian Michael Phelps to push foods like Frosted Flakes? Trying to make Frosted Flakes this generation's "breakfast of champions" is symptomatic of this age of hyper-commercialism, which has contributed to childhood obesity. Some companies, like Disney, who will describe their many positive efforts here today, are taking steps in the right direction, but not enough are.

My hope for today is that we decide to take solid stands to turn this epidemic around. It will take a collective effort to help parents and children make healthier and better food choices. It will take a collective effort to get food manufacturers, advertisers and media executives to make different and wiser business decisions. It will take a collective effort to help government, particularly us at the FCC, to make prudent policy decisions within the limits of our authority and jurisdiction.

Lawmakers in all cities and towns across the county are confronting this epidemic. The Baltimore City Council Task Force on Childhood Obesity, for example, recently released its report finding that local governments need to improve the conditions of neighborhood parks and access to nutritious food for city residents, to create "health zones" surrounding targeted neighborhood schools to engage an entire neighborhood to be healthier, and even to ban the use of trans fat in restaurants.

While FCC does not play such a direct role, we have a key role to play when it comes to the impact of the media on obesity. We need to step up to the plate and act where we have authority, for example, in addressing the use of interactive ads on television, or host-selling during children's programming, or the sometimes misleading sponsorship or integration of unhealthy foods into programming intended for children.

I believe many parents, like me, are feeling inundated by an array of media that are flooding their children's minds with material they consider inappropriate. Too many parents feel like they're losing control. They are frustrated by a seemingly relentless march of material that is too commercial, unhealthful, violent, or sexual for their children. For parents, it is like a game of whack-a-mole, with a multiplying number of moles jumping up faster and faster. Too many parents suffer from a sense of exhaustion and feel like giving up. And no wonder, they are swimming against the stream of \$10 billion dollar torrent of advertising pushing in the opposite direction.

The Commission needs to play a more effective role in working to help parents insulate their children from not only from indecent programming, but also unhealthful content. We need to establish a much more active working partnership with all of you and with producers and distributors of content -- that serves the best interest of protecting our children. Just because no single step will fully address the many issues we are discussing today doesn't mean we should take no steps at all.

To begin with, we should encourage more positive children's programming like the free quality children's programming offered by public broadcasters. That will require more resources to produce. The Commission can help by providing broadcasters with a clearer set of guidelines to identify what constitutes "educational" content.

We should also allocate resources to our staff bureaus to develop a nationwide campaign to educate U.S. households, including parents and children, about media literacy, healthy food choices and parental controls, in coordination with the broadcasting and cable industry, and request additional resources as needed to do so by Congress.

And we need to act quickly on the 2004 Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on how to implement sensible restrictions on interactive ads targeting children. We tentatively concluded then that interactive ads targeting children should be banned. With the growing convergence of TV and the Internet, we need to set the rules before interactive advertising becomes an established business model.

Just because there are no easy answers and no panacea does not mean we can give up. The task before us is as enormous as it is urgent. We are hearing eloquent pleas today that our children are under assault and need our protection. We will not have met our responsibility as adults if we don't act on those warnings. Our children need our focus and action now.

Thank you for joining us today in this cause, and thank you, Commissioner Tate, for making this happen.